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SUBJECT: NEA DAS CARPENTER DISCUSSES EGYPTIAN REFORM WITH LEADING INDEPENDENT ANALYSTS

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4. (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In meetings on the Egyptian constitutional amendments with NEA DAS Scott Carpenter during a March 9-11 visit, several independent analysts said that Egypt's constitutional amendment process had been flawed by the GOE and NDP's tight control over the process. These critics asserted that the carefully managed constitutional reform process was unlikely to expand the democratic space in Egypt.

They noted that the GOE and NDP's apparent unwillingness to support a genuine political opening is a recipe for future instability, and they further agreed that while Gamal Mubarak is the front runner to succeed his father, Gamal's inability thus far to build a constituency (either with the Egyptian people writ large or with the military-security apparatus) increases the risk that Gamal's ability to govern (as distinct from his ability to engineer a succession to his father) might be threatened by popular unrest or future challenges from within the GOE. End summary.

¶2. (C) Issandr El-Amrani, a Cairo-based analyst who covers Egypt for the Eurasia Group, and Elijah Zarwan, the Human Rights Watch representative in Cairo (protect both) told DAS Carpenter on March 9 that many of the proposed constitutional amendments had led to growing concern that the GOE and the NDP are simply focused on tightening control over Egypt's political life, behind a facade of ostensible political reform. El-Amrani and Zarwan recommended that the USG press the GOE to ensure that the legislation that emerges subsequent to the constitutional amendment process (in such areas as electoral supervision, anti-terror statutes, and regulation of political parties) will in fact expand the democratic space in Egypt. El-Amrani noted that USG engagement on these issues--since they impinge on Egyptian sovereignty--was a delicate subject for the GOE.

¶3. (C) El-Amrani further noted his concern that continued tight control by the GOE over Egypt's democratic space might pay short term benefits with regard to stability under Hosni Mubarak, but he said that independent analysts are increasingly concerned that the GOE's tactics run the risk of contributing to instability, particularly if President Mubarak were to die or be incapacitated. El-Amrani speculated that if the GOE continues to cut off avenues of legal, non-violent political participation for both the secular opposition and the Muslim Brotherhood, and remains unable to build real popular support for the ruling party, it faces potential crisis if and when an economic dislocation or other shock, including labor unrest, were to occur. El-Amrani noted that he and other independent analysts have increasingly begun to wonder if an event like the 1952 riots, which precipitated the Free Officers coup d'etat, might be on the horizon.

¶4. (C) Hugh Roberts (protect), the Cairo representative for

the International Crisis Group, echoed El-Amrani's concerns about the potential for instability, particularly in a hypothetical period after Gamal's succession of his father. In a March 10 meeting with DAS Carpenter, Roberts observed that Gamal's current power, and apparent ability to succeed his father, is predicated almost entirely on his father's dominance of the Egyptian political system. Roberts argued that Hosni Mubarak may be able to engineer Gamal's succession, but Gamal's ability to govern--particularly if Hosni Mubarak departs the scene--might be challenged by popular unrest and/or intervention by the military-security apparatus. Roberts speculated that economic dislocation early in a post-Hosni Mubarak era could lead to popular unrest (along the lines of the 1952 or 1977 riots) that might trigger competition for the leadership. Aside from a relatively small group of reformist businessmen and party officials, Roberts argued, Gamal's only power base is his proximity to his father. A key factor in Egypt's stability in the post-Hosni Mubarak era, Roberts argued, will be the military, but he noted that the military's current role and views on governance are "opaque and off-stage." Roberts said he knew of no analysts with insight into the Egyptian military's view of Egypt's future governance. Roberts said it is not clear if President Mubarak "has drained the military of the capacity to play a leading role in the succession."

¶5. (C) According to Roberts, Gamal Mubarak and the reformist wing of the party "have been unable to articulate a political project that rallies Egyptians around them." Roberts described the constitutional amendment process as "conceived and composed... and totally controlled by the top of the NDP," which he described as not serious about seeking real consensus but instead focused on maintaining a monopoly

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on power. He asserted that the "process is very managed and not democratic." Roberts argued that "where once there was an opening, there is a now a closing" of genuine political reform. The current leadership, argued Roberts, has moved to crush the Muslim Brotherhood and to eliminate any meaningful secular opposition, but at the same time, it has not yet succeeded in turning the NDP into anything other than a "hollow shell, unable to reform itself." The GOE's treatment of Ayman Nour, said Roberts, "speaks volumes about the monopolist approach of the GOE." Roberts noted that this approach might pay short term stability dividends for the leadership, but it did nothing to build the kinds of institutions that will be crucial to ensuring stability in the longer term. (Note: Roberts is currently in Washington, through March 20, to participate in a seminar at the Department on Algerian politics. He expressed his willingness to discuss Egypt further with DAS Carpenter or other USG officials. End note.)

¶6. (U) DAS Carpenter has cleared this message.  
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